United Nations S/2016/706

Security Council

Distr.: General
12 August 2016

Original: English

Thirty-second progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia

I. Introduction

1. By its resolution 2239 (2015), the Security Council extended the mandate of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) until 30 September 2016 and requested me to keep it informed of the situation in Liberia and the implementation of that resolution. The present report provides an update on major developments since my report of 22 February (S/2016/169), including the assumption by the Government of Liberia of its security responsibilities from UNMIL on 30 June, as well as my recommendation for the extension of the Mission's mandate.

II. Major developments

A. Political situation

2. During the reporting period, considerable attention was focused on the assumption by the Government of Liberia of its security responsibilities from UNMIL, which was achieved by the 30 June deadline established by the Security Council in resolution 2190 (2014) and reaffirmed in subsequent resolutions. Political discourse was also dominated by the upcoming 2017 elections and the fallout from corruption charges levelled against senior officials by the international non-governmental organization Global Witness, as well as the worsening economic situation in the country.

3. In the period leading up to the conclusion of the security transition, there was considerable public anxiety about the ability of the security forces to protect the population and to maintain stability, with reassurances from the Government about the readiness of national security agencies to perform the tasks that UNMIL had previously been undertaking. Given the public distrust of the Government, a group of political and civil society actors threatened to stage mass demonstrations in Monrovia in early March to express their lack of confidence in the capacity of the Liberian institutions to provide security throughout the country. They called off their planned rally, however, at the request of my Special Representative for Liberia and, instead, on 11 March, presented him with a petition addressed to the Security Council, which called for a continued UNMIL presence beyond the elections to be held in October 2017. Against the backdrop of a politically tense environment,

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fomented largely by widespread suspicion over the causes of certain high-profile deaths, this development successfully averted the potential for street violence, which has often accompanied such demonstrations. To raise confidence and awareness among the population about its mandate and transition-related activities, UNMIL continued to hold town hall meetings throughout the country, deployed a "peace caravan" comprising traditional communicators and artists to 11 of the 15 counties and dedicated airtime for government officials to convey confidence-building messages about progress in building national security capacity on UNMIL Radio, which broadcasts around the clock in all counties. During a ceremony held on 1 July to mark the assumption of security responsibilities by the Government, the President of Liberia, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, and my Special Representative underscored the fact that the United Nations would continue to support the consolidation of peace in Liberia.

4. During the reporting period, there were several changes in the President's cabinet. In April, the former Minister of Justice, Benedict Sannoh, resigned after tenure of just over a year for reasons that were not made public. In addition, the Minister of Finance and Development Planning, Amarah Konneh, resigned to take up a position with the World Bank. The ministers were replaced by former River Gee County Senator Frederick Cherue and former Deputy Governor of the Central Bank of Liberia Boima Kamara, respectively. Both appointments were confirmed by the Senate and the incumbents have assumed their positions.

5. On 11 May, Global Witness published a report entitled "The Deceivers", which detailed allegations of bribery and other corrupt acts, implicating several persons, including senior Liberian officials and members of the ruling Unity Party. On 12 May, the President requested a special presidential task force, which was already established to follow up on other corruption cases, to investigate the charges. The then Chair of the Unity Party, Senator Varney Sherman, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Alex Tyler, formerly a senior Unity Party official, were indicted on 24 May on charges of bribery, criminal conspiracy, economic sabotage, criminal soliciting and criminal facilitation. On 25 May, Mr. Sherman was arrested and Mr. Tyler appeared in court under police escort. Both were released on bail but charged in court on the same day. The arrests were met with criticism from some legislators who questioned the authority of the Executive to undertake such investigations. The charges also created divisions within the Legislature, with some legislators calling for the recusal of the Speaker, leading to a series of altercations within the House of Representatives. The Speaker, in turn, accused the President of using the charges to attempt to remove him from office. Meanwhile, divisions within the ruling party deepened, with Mr. Sherman and his supporters lobbying against the President. During the party's convention, held from 7 to 9 July, the Vice-President of Liberia, Joseph Boakai, was elected uncontested as the party's standard bearer, with the support of the President. The election of serving ministers into the party's executive committee drew criticism from political parties and civil society, however, who pointed to the code of conduct for public officials, which prohibits Government employees appointed by the President from engaging in, or using government resources for, partisan political activities.

6. On 17 June, the National Elections Commission published the schedule for the 2017 presidential and legislative elections, including the launch of civic education activities in January 2017, voter registration in February 2017 and the start of official campaigning on 8 August 2017. In June, a decision was reached, through a

process involving the Government, the Commission, the donor community and the United Nations, to adopt an optical mark recognition system for voter registration, rather than a biometric one, given that it would reduce costs and could be achieved in a relatively compressed time frame. Opposition parties expressed concern about possible fraud resulting from the use of the optical mark system.

7. Since my previous report, Alexander Cummings of the opposition party Alternative National Congress declared his intention to run for president, and the Unity Party formally nominated Mr. Boakai as its candidate. The number of political parties has increased to 23, following the registration in May of two new parties, the Movement for Democracy and Reconstruction and Vision for Liberia Transformation. The registration of more than 20 additional political parties is pending. My Special Representative engaged regularly with political parties and other stakeholders, encouraging political party dialogue, consultation, information-sharing and coordination through the renewed framework of the Inter-Party Consultative Committee organized by the National Elections Commission.

8. On 17 March, a House of Representatives committee recommended that 6 of the 25 constitutional reform propositions, supported and submitted by the President on 13 August 2015, be taken forward to a referendum. On 26 April, a Senate committee requested that the President provide formulations on the six proposed amendments, which it had yet to receive as at 1 August. Meanwhile, the debate on proposition 24, which seeks to declare Liberia a nation founded on Christian principles, continued to impede progress on the constitutional review process. On 5 March, the National Muslim Council of Liberia temporarily suspended its membership in the Inter-Religious Council of Liberia, in protest of what it perceived as support for the proposal by Christian community leaders, including the Pentecostal bloc of the Liberian Council of Churches whose position was initially unclear. My Special Representative remained extensively engaged with leaders of various religious groups in both communities and other stakeholders with a view to de-escalating the public rhetoric and encouraging constructive dialogue. In May, the Independent National Commission on Human Rights submitted a petition against the provision, which, in its assessment, would undermine unity and peace. The Parliament of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) also called upon Liberia to reconsider the petition in the light of the likely consequence that it would entrench religious divides. On 2 and 3 May, the Liberian Council of Churches and the Inter-Religious Council of Liberia, respectively, issued statements expressing their opposition to the proposition, which was followed by the resumed participation of the National Muslim Council of Liberia in the Inter-Religious Council of Liberia. On 6 July, the Senate Judiciary Committee forwarded its report on the constitutional review process to the Senate. The report organized the propositions into eight categories, with a stand-alone category for the controversial proposition 24. Dates for the public hearings in the Senate on the propositions have yet to be determined. In that regard, my Special Representative has been engaging with the leadership of the Legislature to decide on the specific provisions to be carried forward.

9. On 17 May, the President submitted a revised budget for the 2016/17 fiscal year in the amount of $556 million to the Legislature. The proposed budget represents a reduction of 11 per cent compared with 2015/16, owing to austerity measures instituted by the Government in the light of the global decline in the prices of Liberia's export commodities. Those measures include an increase in the

local currency portion of salaries and allowances paid to public employees to reduce foreign currency spending.

B. National reconciliation, political reforms and governance

10. No progress was made during the reporting period in advancing critical pending reform legislation, including with respect to land rights, decentralization and governance. There continued to be delays in advancing national reconciliation, with the Palava Hut initiative stalled. County peace committees, the local-level conflict management mechanism, continued to face funding challenges. Following the directive from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, only three committees, in Grand Cape Mount, Grand Gedeh and Lofa Counties, began to receive budgetary support from their respective county development funds.

11. UNMIL, through its quick-impact projects, provided support for the work of the Peace Ambassador, William Tolbert III, including the consultations held on 8 June with eminent persons on peacebuilding priorities and potential triggers for social unrest leading up to the 2017 elections. On 11 May, the Peace Ambassador organized remembrance ceremonies, with the participation of Christian and Muslim young people, to commemorate the victims of the civil conflict, focusing on youth participation in order to highlight the importance of maintaining social cohesion.

12. Following the expiration of the mandate of the Land Commission in January, the President established an interim land taskforce on 18 March to facilitate the passage of the land authority bill submitted to the Legislature in 2014 and to maintain engagement with relevant partners, donors and other stakeholders in the land sector. On 12 April, the Senate approved the land authority bill, which remained pending as at 1 August, awaiting the concurrence of the House of Representatives. On 28 June, representatives of 18 civil society organizations published a statement warning that the continued failure to formalize customary rights to land within the law could jeopardize peace and security and potentially fuel a backslide into conflict.

13. Between 1 February and 1 August, the Government established county service centres in three counties, as part of the implementation of its deconcentration support plan, which is linked to the decentralization reform process. The centres, which are now functioning in a total of four counties, provide a range of public and legal services, including the issuance of birth certificates, business and driver's licenses and deeds, previously only available in Monrovia. The Government has publically committed to establishing service centres in all 15 counties by the end of the term of the current administration in January 2018.

14. On 19 April, the Peacebuilding Commission and the Government endorsed a revised statement of mutual commitments, in which the Government committed to advancing security sector reform, strengthening the rule of law, promoting national reconciliation, protecting human rights and working towards holding peaceful and inclusive elections in 2017. For its part, the Peacebuilding Commission committed to supporting those peacebuilding efforts by advocating for the necessary resources. In June, a delegation led by the Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission, Macharia Kamau, visited Liberia and other countries in the region to discuss support for peacebuilding priorities, taking into account the impact of the Ebola outbreak.

15. During the period under review, the General Auditing Commission completed the audit of the procurement practices of the Ministry of Public Works with regard to the construction of roads and bridges during the period from 1 July 2010 to 30 June 2013 and the management by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the grants received from the Government of Japan in 2008. In both cases, the Commission uncovered significant improprieties, including breaches of procurement and public financial management laws. The audit reports are now before the Legislature, and a task force has been charged with investigating and proposing appropriate action for allegations of current and past Commission reports. The same task force is currently mandated to investigate the bribery allegations contained in the Global Witness report.

16. On 23 February, the former Minister of Commerce and Industry, Miatta Beyslow, a director in the Ministry, the former managing director of the Liberia Petroleum Refining Company, Nelson Williams, and a deputy managing director for operations were indicted on charges of misapplication of entrusted property, criminal conspiracy, criminal facilitation and violation of the public procurement and concessions procedures and processes, resulting in Government losses of more than $13 million between 2013 and 2015. Twelve former and current government officials are being prosecuted on related criminal charges, whereas charges against Ms. Beyslow were dropped on 20 July 2016.

C. Security situation

17. The security situation remained generally stable, with limited improvements recorded. Major challenges included intermittent public order concerns involving allegations of poor governance and corruption, tensions in the concession areas, suspicion over certain deaths and ritual killings and divisions along religious lines.

18. Perceptions of discrimination, exclusion and marginalization along ethnic or religious lines, underpinned by land disputes and historic resentments, continued to pose risks for tensions turning into violent confrontations. During the period under review, concession-related labour and land disputes, some of which turned violent, were the primary causes of tensions. On 1 April, approximately 700 aggrieved workers of the Cocopa rubber plantation in Nimba County staged a protest to demand several months of salary arrears, after which they received severance packages. UNMIL contributed to the facilitation of the settlement. On 5 April, workers of Sime Darby palm plantation near Tubmanburg in Bomi County demonstrated in protest of the disappearance of a young woman, who was suspected to have been the victim of ritual killing but was later found alive. The Police Support Unit of the Liberia National Police deployed to the scene and arrested two alleged organizers, who were later released. On 15 June, an intervention by the civil society organization Concession Working Group helped to de-escalate a potentially violent land dispute between the Aureus Mining Company and affected communities in Grand Cape Mount County.

19. On 9 May, approximately 150 inhabitants of illegally built structures on the University of Liberia's Fendell campus protested against an eviction and demolition exercise conducted by the Ministry of Public Works, temporarily blocking the Monrovia-Kakata highway.

D. Regional issues

20. On 4 June, Mrs. Johnson-Sirleaf became the first woman elected Chair of ECOWAS. In her acceptance speech, she committed to prioritizing the fight against terrorism in West Africa, in collaboration with regional governments and the international community. She also pledged to focus on agricultural development in the region, with the aim of eradicating poverty and ensuring food security.

21. On 6 May, the Government organized a special session on the threat of terrorism in West Africa, bringing together security experts with representatives from ECOWAS member States to devise strategies for preventing and combating terrorism in the region, including through greater collaboration among West African nations. On 16 June, the President signed an executive order approving the legal framework for, and enabling the establishment of, a national early warning and response mechanism coordination centre, in line with Liberia's obligations as an ECOWAS member State. The President of the Commission of ECOWAS, Marcel de Souza, and the President of Liberia met on 17 June to discuss cooperation between Liberia and the regional organization on security and development issues. On 21 June, the Vice-President launched the ECOWAS national early warning and rapid response mechanism in Liberia and constituted its board.

22. UNMIL and the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) continued to support cooperation between their respective host Governments, including the elaboration of joint operational guidance for future security operations to be conducted by the two national armies, as agreed during a quadripartite security meeting held in March in Grand Bassam, Côte d'Ivoire. From 11 to 13 May, UNMIL and UNOCI provided logistical support to technical and ministerial meetings of the Mano River Union on peace and security held in Côte d'Ivoire. On 7 June, the Mano River Union held the first meeting of its joint border security and confidence-building unit since the Ebola outbreak in Toulepleu, Côte d'Ivoire, which brought together officials of both Governments, including from security agencies, and representatives of border communities and the United Nations to discuss common cross-border challenges. The meetings concluded with an agreement on a draft subregional counter-terrorism framework and a memorandum of understanding on maritime security, to be finalized and adopted by the respective ministers of defence.

23. On 9 March, a joint team comprising Armed Forces of Liberia and Forestry Development Authority personnel apprehended 20 nationals of Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire for illegal farming activities in Tarsala village in Grand Gedeh County, near the Tempo border crossing point. The arrested persons were handed over to the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization, which subsequently transferred them to the national police. They remain detained in Zwedru prison where they are currently awaiting trial. On 28 March, Guinean authorities reported the seizure in Macenta, Guinea, near the Guinea-Liberia border, of a motorcycle transporting a cache of weapons, including rockets, rocket launchers and rifles. The authorities are investigating the incident to determine the origin and intended destination of the weapons. On 15 June, a national of Burkina Faso was arrested at a checkpoint in Grand Gedeh County for allegedly being in possession of dynamite intended for use in an illicit goldmine.

E. Humanitarian situation

24. As at 1 August, Liberia was hosting 20,049 registered Ivoirian refugees, including 15,300 in refugee camps and 4,700 in host communities. Although the border with Côte d'Ivoire remained closed at the insistence of the Government of Côte d'Ivoire, as a precautionary measure against the Ebola virus disease, humanitarian corridors remained open for the repatriation of Ivorian refugees. Since the resumption of voluntary repatriation operations in December 2015, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has facilitated the return to Côte d'Ivoire of 18,124 refugees. UNHCR remains on track to reach its target of facilitating the repatriation of 25,000 refugees in 2016, but the rate of returns has decreased since peaking at 4,094 in March. This is attributed to the refugees' concerns about security and access to land and other property in areas of return, as well as the onset of the rainy season. The refugees' concerns about conditions in areas of return were conveyed to a delegation from the Government of Côte d'Ivoire, led by the Minister of Solidarity, Social Cohesion and Compensation, which visited the three camps hosting Ivorian refugees in May.

25. On 22 March, Liberia temporarily closed its border with Guinea, following an outbreak of the Ebola virus disease in the Nzérékoré region of Guinea. On 31 March in Monrovia, a woman and her two children tested positive for Ebola, after reportedly entering the country through an unofficial border-crossing point with Guinea. UNMIL engaged its good offices to encourage the reopening of the border in order to reduce unofficial crossings, while also strengthening controls at official checkpoints. The border was reopened after five days, with enhanced joint surveillance at the border. The incident management system, which was activated on 31 March, successfully contained the virus to the three originally infected persons. As part of the outbreak response, the infected persons and those who had been in contact with them received an experimental Ebola vaccine but, these efforts notwithstanding, the mother of the two children died from the virus. On 9 June, the World Health Organization declared Liberia Ebola-free for the fourth time. Infection prevention and control standards continued to be closely monitored, while epidemic response plans were updated to take into account lessons learned from the most recent outbreak.

26. On 9 May, the Legislature passed a disaster management bill, providing for the establishment of a national agency that would be the institution responsible for disaster preparedness, early warning and response. Given that the bill has not yet been formally enacted, no allocations were provided for the agency in the proposed 2016/17 national budget. The United Nations and ECOWAS continued to support the Ministry of Internal Affairs, including in strengthening the capacity of county disaster management committees, training in the mapping of natural hazards and formulating disaster response plans.

F. Human rights situation

27. The human rights situation continued to be characterized by sexual and gender-based violence, harmful traditional practices, challenges to freedom of speech and weak institutional capacity to promote and protect human rights. No progress was witnessed with respect to implementing the recommendations of the

Truth and Reconciliation Commission, including those aimed at addressing impunity for war or economic crimes.

28. During the reporting period, UNMIL documented 80 reported cases of rape. Of those, 70 survivors were girls, 8 were women and 2 were boys. The actual incidence of rape is assessed as higher. Capacity constraints within the criminal justice system continued to hinder efforts to bring perpetrators to justice. Harmful traditional practices continued to be reported, and often the perpetrators were not prosecuted. Consideration of a domestic violence bill submitted to the Legislature in September 2015 stalled owing to disagreements about provisions that would criminalize female genital mutilation, a commitment made by the Government during the universal periodic review of the Human Rights Council on 25 September 2015. The bill was passed in the House of Representatives on 21 July, after the removal of the provisions criminalizing female genital mutilation. Consequently, the Independent National Commission on Human Rights and the Ministry of Justice are advocating for separate legislation to criminalize female genital mutilation. On 1 March, the Government and the United Nations launched a joint programme on the prevention and response to sexual and gender-based violence and harmful traditional practices, which will require donor support for its effective implementation.

29. Other harmful traditional practices, including forced initiation into secret societies and trial by ordeal and other punishments for those accused of witchcraft, continued to be reported, and the perpetrators of such practices are rarely held accountable. The Ministry of Internal Affairs, with support from UNMIL, continued to conduct training aimed at sensitizing traditional leaders about the human rights violations inherent in some traditional practices.

30. In June, the Government dropped the criminal libel and sedition charges against Vanderlark Patricks, a prominent civil society activist, and Simeon Freeman, a leading member of the opposition party Movement for Progressive Change, who alleged that the Government had been complicit in the death, under unclear circumstances, of a former executive of a national energy company. My Special Representative continued to advocate for the repeal of legislation that infringes the right to freedom of expression and criminalizes free speech, in violation of the Constitution of Liberia and its international treaty commitments.

31. In April, the final two commissioners were appointed to the Independent National Commission on Human Rights. Some civil society organizations, however, accused the President of violating the law, given that one of the appointees was reportedly not included on the initial list of nominees. Meanwhile, the Commission developed its complaints procedures which, once approved, should improve its operations.

32. Following the standing invitation extended by the Government to special procedures of the United Nations Human Rights Council in September 2015, Liberia engaged with the Special Rapporteur on the right to education and the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of human rights by persons with albinism. In May, the Government of Liberia submitted its common core document, containing general information common to all treaties to which it is a party. This constitutes an important step towards meeting its reporting obligations.

G. Economic situation

33. The global decline in commodity prices and the effects of the Ebola epidemic continued to affect Liberia's economy. Economic growth, which was zero per cent in 2015, is projected to increase to 2.5 per cent in 2016. The fiscal space continued to shrink, however, resulting in a $70 million reduction in the 2015/16 national budget of $622.7 million. The proposed national budget for 2016/17 of $556 million represents an 11 per cent decrease from the 2015/16 fiscal period. The public sector investment plan, which includes $20 million for the 2017 elections and $10 million for implementing outstanding activities under the Government plan for the transition of security responsibilities from UNMIL, represents less than a third of the required $209 million.

34. The value of the Liberian dollar continued to depreciate against the United States dollar, reaching 96 Liberian dollars per United States dollar, compared with 84 Liberian dollars per United States dollar in the first quarter of 2015. On 3 March, the President requested authorization from the Legislature to print additional currency. The request is currently pending approval. This could increase spending in the short term, but poses the risk of further deflation in the value of the local currency against international currencies. In May, the President indicated that she plans to increase the share of government expenditures, including salaries, to be paid in Liberian dollars in order to enable the Central Bank of Liberia to restore its foreign currency reserves, in compliance with International Monetary Fund requirements.

35. On 25 April, the Government undertook a midterm review of its development framework, the Agenda for Transformation, which recommended prioritizing interventions focusing on infrastructure and the agriculture sectors. Although some achievements were attained, notably improvements in the electric power grid and the establishment of county service centres, the Agenda has fallen short with regard to the economic growth projected for 2015/16. The depressed prices of primary export commodities, as well as the impact of Ebola, have reduced gross domestic product to 0.3 per cent from the projected growth of 4.6 per cent.

36. On 14 June, the Legislature ratified the protocol of accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO), and Liberia's accession was effective as at 14 July. The Government and WTO are formulating Liberia's post-accession plan. The terms and conditions of accession are intended to facilitate the country's efforts to diversify, modernize and integrate into the global economy. As part of the accession negotiations, Liberia concluded six bilateral market access agreements on goods and three on services.

III. Development of national security and justice capacities

A. Security transition

37. On 1 July, the President, high-level officials and international partners marked the conclusion of the security transition at a ceremony held in Monrovia. The President noted that a number of activities in the transition plan had yet to be implemented and reaffirmed the Government's determination to implement key priority activities before the conclusion of her tenure. The security transition

process involved successful joint cooperation at the strategic and technical levels between the Government, the United Nations and international partners.

38. In accordance with the Government's transition plan, security tasks such as explosive ordnance disposal, maritime patrolling and VIP protection responsibilities were handed over to the Government in May. Some activities under the transition plan, including those relating to logistics for law enforcement agencies, the enactment of legislation on the police and immigration services, remain outstanding owing to insufficient funding, procurement delays and pending legislation. My Special Representative has been engaging with the Government and international partners to prioritize the completion of critical tasks, especially the establishment of civilian oversight boards for the police and immigration, firearms training for immigration personnel and the deployment of public defenders. The Government has allocated $10 million in the 2016/17 national budget to implement critical security transition activities, but it has not yet fully disbursed funds that were previously committed for the implementation of those tasks.

B. National security strategy and architecture

39. Some progress was made in developing the national security architecture. The Government has recommenced the review of the national security strategy, which had been suspended since 2014 owing to the Ebola crisis, and has initiated discussions on the regulation of private security companies. Both processes are being supported by UNMIL. Meanwhile, 8 county and 58 additional district security councils were established during the period under review, bringing their numbers to 12 and 80, respectively. Under the National Security Reform and Intelligence Act of 2011, these councils serve as early warning mechanisms.

40. Gaps in legislation and policy for the security sector continued to persist, including a draft uniform code of military justice that is pending submission to the Legislature. UNMIL has provided technical and advisory support to the Ministries of National Defence and Justice in establishing a framework of criminal accountability for military personnel under the civilian justice system, which was finalized through a memorandum of understanding signed in May. The coming into force of the police and immigration acts, currently being revisited by the Legislature after their initial passage in April, is pending. Meanwhile, work commenced on the drafting of related regulations and administrative instructions, including regulations on the establishment of policy management boards, civilian complaint review boards, disciplinary boards and rights and conditions of service boards.

41. On 24 May, the Senate approved a report by its defence, intelligence and veteran affairs committee on Liberia's vulnerabilities to terrorism and other security threats and recommended ensuring adequate budgetary provisions for the national security sector and the adoption of the national security action plan. On 11 July, the Senate decided to consider terrorism as a threat to Liberia's security. The Liberia National Commission for Small Arms made progress in the management of Government-owned arms and ammunition. The enactment of legislation to regulate firearms owned by private individuals, however, is currently being fine-tuned. With the support of UNMIL, the national police continued to conduct the marking of its arms and ammunitions, in compliance with the ECOWAS Convention on Small

Arms and Light Weapons, Their Ammunition and Other Related Materials, of 2006, and also began efforts to decentralize its small arms control unit.

C. Liberia National Police

42. As at 1 August, the strength of the national police stood at 5,106 officers, of whom 951 were women. No additional deployments were made during the reporting period.

43. In March, a six-month training course on basic policing skills, investigations, human rights and police procedures began for 108 new recruits, of whom 37 were women. The national police training academy also conducted training for 42 middle management officers, of whom 2 were women, in order to strengthen internal management, incident management and crisis response capacity. UNMIL continued to support the national police in enhancing its leadership and its command, control and communication capacities. UNMIL provided three training programmes targeting 65 senior officers, of whom 9 were women. The training, mentoring and equipping of the national police have also led to improvements in its capacity to investigate and preserve crime scenes and collect forensic evidence in cases of sexual and gender-based violence, however, owing to bottlenecks in the justice system, only 7 of 202 cases that resulted in indictments have been fully prosecuted.

44. The transnational crime unit has not been fully operationalized, notwithstanding continued advocacy by the United Nations for the review of its memorandum of understanding, in addition to the implementation of recommendations for its management board, as provided for in the Government's transition plan. Among the challenges were lack of national ownership and protracted capacity and financial shortfalls.

D. Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization

45. As at 1 August, the strength of the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization stood at 2,596 officers, of whom 751 were women. In May, 250 recruits, of whom 38 were women, graduated and were deployed to border counties. Seven senior officers obtained diplomas from the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration in May. With the support of UNMIL, 20 managers, of whom 5 were women, were trained in change management, command, control and communication, strategic leadership and customer service. UNMIL also provided advice to 19 trainers of immigration personnel on curriculum development and course delivery. Another 196 officers, of whom 18 were women, were trained on document fraud detection, passenger profiling, security threat identification and the irregular movement of migrants. Fifteen human resources officers were deployed outside of Monrovia in May to improve internal management and accountability systems.

46. In order to strengthen border security, UNMIL supported the training of 50 border patrol officers, of whom 18 were women. A committee was also established to screen prospective officers for firearms training.

E. Judicial, legal and corrections institutions

47. As at 1 August, there were 1,333 pretrial detainees nationwide, representing 64 per cent of the prison population. The high percentage is attributed to weak internal oversight capacity within the justice system and outdated legislation, and limited progress was made in implementing measures to address systemic challenges. As a consequence, many citizens continued to rely on traditional justice mechanisms for dispute resolution. UNMIL continued to engage with the Chief Justice and the Minister of Justice to encourage the implementation of outstanding reform measures. The Mission established a working group focused on criminal justice reform comprising the Ministry of Justice and representatives of the judiciary and UNMIL. In April, training began for 60 lay magistrates, of whom 6 were women.

48. During the period under review, there were two prison escapes, down from six recorded during the previous period. UNMIL continued to support the Bureau of Corrections and Rehabilitation with training on security, intelligence and investigations, and also provided prison superintendents with guidance on prison management. Cooperation between the national police and corrections services continued to be strengthened, with support from UNMIL. The national police provide perimeter security for the maximum security prisons in Monrovia and Zwedru, given that budgetary constraints and lack of firearms training prevented the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization from assuming responsibility for those tasks. Meanwhile, prisons were 55 per cent over capacity. To reduce pressure on the corrections system, UNMIL continued to advocate for the use of alternatives to incarceration.

49. UNMIL provided technical support for the review of the Rules of Court and Judicial Canons, the code of conduct for lawyers and judges, and supported a consultative workshop to formulate a witness protection policy. Efforts are also under way, in consultation with national actors, to reform the traditional justice system, bringing it in line with international human rights standards so that it serves as an effective and accountable complement of the formal justice system.

F. Armed Forces of Liberia

50. As at 1 August, the Armed Forces of Liberia comprised 2,236 personnel, of whom 91 were women. On 30 April, the armed forces assumed full responsibility from UNMIL for explosive ordnance disposal. To date, 31 sappers (soldier engineers) have received level I and II training in basic explosive ordnance destruction procedures.

IV. Deployment of the United Nations Mission in Liberia

A. Military component

51. As indicated in my previous reports, UNMIL has been progressively drawing down since 2006, bringing the mission from its peak authorized strength of 15,250 to the current authorized strength of 1,240. As at 1 August, the force's strength stood at 1,235 personnel, of whom 77 were women. The military

component consists of one infantry battalion based in Monrovia, the associated enablers, a force headquarters and 60 military observers.

52. Pursuant to Security Council resolution 2239 (2015), UNMIL withdrew 2,350 troops by 30 June, including an infantry battalion and engineering and support companies, and reduced the personnel within the remaining support units. All assigned force security transition handover tasks have been completed. A new military concept of operations was finalized in July, which takes into account the revised security role of UNMIL as of the conclusion of the security transition. This includes the mandate to support the Liberian security agencies in protecting civilians in the event of a deterioration of the security situation that could risk a strategic reversal of peace and stability in the country, taking into account the Mission's reduced capabilities and areas of deployment. The quick reaction force established within UNOCI in accordance with Council resolution 2162 (2014) remained for over-the-horizon support to UNMIL in the event of a serious deterioration of the security situation in Liberia, without prejudice to its primary responsibility for providing security in Côte d'Ivoire. As part of the drawdown and reconfiguration of the military component, military observers were consolidated in the remaining UNMIL field offices in Gbarnga, Greenville, Harper, Voinjama and Zwedru, in addition to Monrovia, where they work closely with their civilian and police counterparts on monitoring and reporting. As the reconfiguration remains under review, further adjustments to the UNMIL field presence, particularly in Maryland and Sinoe Counties, could be expected.

B. Police component

53. As at 1 August, UNMIL police strength stood at 570 police personnel, against an authorized ceiling of 606 police personnel, including 191 individual police and immigration advisors and 379 police personnel in three formed police units deployed in Gbarnga, Monrovia and Zwedru. Of those personnel, 11.23 per cent were women. The drawdown of UNMIL police was achieved by 30 June as scheduled through a robust planning framework, with 500 formed police personnel and 53 individual police and immigration advisors ending their mission since my last report. A revised concept of police operations was finalized in July, reflecting the Mission's revised security and protection of civilians mandate as at 1 July, taking into account the conclusion of the security transition.

C. Civilian component

54. As at 1 August, 983 civilian personnel, including 138 United Nations Volunteers, were serving with UNMIL. In total, 25.8 per cent of civilian personnel were women.

D. Support considerations

55. UNMIL continued to consolidate its field presence, with five offices remaining in Gbarnga, Greenville, Harper, Voinjama and Zwedru, as well as a mission headquarters and logistics base in Monrovia. The configuration and operation of the Mission and the need for field offices remains under review, which could result in

further adjustments to the UNMIL field presence, in particular in Maryland and Sinoe Counties. Meanwhile, significant progress has been achieved in co-locating UNMIL and the United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, with preparations advanced for the United Nations Development Programme and the International Organization for Migration to move into UNMIL headquarters in November.

56. In order to minimize costs to the Organization, the drawdown of military and police personnel and the associated movement of heavy equipment were mostly completed before the rainy season and in line with scheduled rotations. UNMIL has in place strong measures to ensure that the closure of camps is environmentally responsible and is working in close cooperation with the Ministry of Environment in that regard. Treatment facilities have been put in place to reduce the impact of wastewater on the local infrastructure.

57. Between July 2015 and June 2016, UNMIL closed 32 mission sites, some 28 of which were handed over to the Government. Most of the camps handed over included equipment that was given to the Government, including prefabricated accommodations, communications towers, water and fuel tanks and electrical installations, after careful assessments for each item and the Government's agreement to accept them. The depreciated value of the donated items in all the camps was $1,070,435.25 and, although all items were usable at the time they were given, their continued use will depend on how they are maintained. Throughout the process of closing its camps, UNMIL has coordinated closely with the Government and has prioritized environmental compliance.

E. Conduct and discipline

58. As at 1 August, no cases of sexual exploitation and abuse involving UNMIL personnel were reported. During the period under review, the Mission continued to undertake intensive measures to implement my policy of zero tolerance of sexual exploitation and abuse. This included a campaign launched by UNMIL and the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection against sexual exploitation and abuse in Bomi, Bong, Grand Gedeh, Lofa, Margibi, Maryland, Montserrado and Sinoe Counties, using representatives from government, civil society and religious organizations who carry out awareness-raising and advocacy activities and facilitate victim assistance efforts.

59. UNMIL continued to provide mandatory training on sexual exploitation and abuse and other conduct-related issues for its personnel. The Mission is preparing an action plan to coordinate efforts to address misconduct, including sexual exploitation and abuse. UNMIL provides assistance and support to victims of sexual exploitation and abuse.

F. Security and safety of United Nations personnel

60. No major security incidents against United Nations personnel were recorded during the reporting period, although there were two residential fires, 13 non-weapons-related crimes and seven weapons-related crimes. Four United Nations personnel died, one from suicide and three from natural causes, including one from Lassa fever. There were 75 road traffic accidents involving United Nations

vehicles, 10 of which resulted in injuries and 1 of which caused the death of a civilian pedestrian.

61. United Nations facilities, assets and operations were affected by eight fires, seven burglaries, eight thefts, three intrusion-related incidents, three attempted thefts and one attempted burglary. During the reporting period, there were also two peaceful demonstrations.

V. Financial aspects

62. The General Assembly, by its resolution 70/278, appropriated the amount of $197.2 million for the maintenance of the Mission for the period from 1 July 2016 to 30 June 2017. Should the Security Council decide to extend the mandate of UNMIL beyond 30 September 2016, the cost for maintaining the Mission would be limited to the amounts approved by the Assembly.

63. As at 4 August 2016, unpaid assessed contributions to the Special Account for the United Nations Mission in Liberia amounted to $81.6 million. The total outstanding assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations as at that date amounted to $4,852.5 million.

64. As at 31 July 2016, amounts owed to troop- and formed police-contributing countries totalled some $6.4 million. Reimbursement of costs relating to troops and formed police units has been made for the period up to 30 April 2016, whereas partial reimbursement of the costs of contingent-owned equipment has been made for the period up to 31 March 2016, in accordance with the quarterly payment schedule.

VI. Observations

65. Liberia reached a historic milestone on its path to lasting peace, on 30 June, when the Government fully assumed its sovereign responsibilities for maintaining stability and protecting civilians. I welcome this development as an indication that the country has turned a corner in the direction of self-reliance in its security affairs. I commend the efforts of the Government of Liberia to successfully achieve the security transition, and I note the attempts at passing legislation on police and immigration services and firearms and ammunition control. I urge all actors to move expeditiously towards their enactment. The improved capacity and professionalism of the national security institutions, demonstrated by their protection of the population independently of UNMIL in the weeks since assuming all security responsibilities, is very encouraging. In this connection, I strongly encourage the Government's continued outreach and communication to enhance public confidence in the ability of the national security services to protect the population.

66. Efforts must continue to be in line with the commitments made in the Agenda for Transformation and the national security strategy of Liberia. These include the need to engage communities, improve operational effectiveness, reduce corruption and increase public confidence through the oversight, accountability, professionalism and legitimacy of the security sector. The transformative reforms under way in Liberia are accompanied by long-term challenges and will require increased investment by the Government and its partners, who have sometimes been

reluctant to meet resource gaps. Predictable funding is essential for the reforms to take root and to ensure the availability of the capacity and resources necessary for the Government to meaningfully deploy the security forces throughout the country and sustain recurring expenses.

67. Given that protecting human rights is fundamental for consolidating peace, rule of law must be equally applicable and accessible to all citizens. Judicial capacities will thus require strengthening, and the Government must take more resolute action against corruption and exclusion and build the population's confidence in their leaders and national institutions.

68. I welcome the Government's efforts to address recent corruption allegations. The President has rightly identified this scourge as a major threat that continues to undermine public and investor confidence. It is critical to address corruption irrespective of political or familial affiliation while ensuring full respect for due process and fundamental human rights during all stages of investigation. I am concerned that recent allegations involving senior Liberian officials have had a negative impact on the working relationship between the Executive and the Legislature, which is blocking progress on critical reform bills. All elected officials entrusted with furthering the interests of the Liberian people should put the country's needs first, including by overcoming disagreements and collaborating to advance the important work that remains to be done.

69. I welcome improvements in the overall peace and security situation of Liberia, concession-related disputes continue to pose risks to stability, in particular when promises made to communities with regard to economic and social development opportunities are not honoured, the environment is degraded and workers' salaries are not paid. I therefore urge the Government to intensify its efforts to hold concessionaires accountable, pass critical legislation such as the land authority bill and work towards further administrative decentralization.

70. Furthermore, I remain very concerned about the high rate of sexual and gender-based violence, in particular against very young girls, and the continued prevalence of harmful traditional practices, such as female genital mutilation. In that regard, I note with regret that the Domestic Violence Act in the House of Representatives, passed on 21 July, excluded the provision prohibiting female genital mutilation. I welcome efforts aimed at enhancing the protection of women and girls, including the launch of a joint Government and United Nations programme on the prevention of and response to sexual and gender-based violence and harmful traditional practices, and call upon partners to provide funding and other support to the five-year strategy.

71. As the 2017 presidential and legislative elections approach, I stress to all political actors and their supporters the importance of adhering to the rule of law and respecting democratic principles and constitutional order. The National Elections Commission has a significant task ahead in sustaining engagement with all 23 registered political parties in support of a transparent and credible electoral process. I welcome in that regard the reinvigoration of the Inter-Party Consultative Committee and the Commission's efforts to engage with the political parties on electoral timelines and amendments to elections law through this important platform. I underscore the importance of free speech and a free media to a healthy democracy and encourage urgent action to repeal libel and sedition laws, which are inconsistent with the Declaration of Table Mountain on press freedom in Africa. All

actors must encourage broad and inclusive participation, in particular of women and young people, in all electoral processes.

72. I remain deeply concerned about the undercurrents of religious and racial intolerance injected into the constitutional review process to date and welcome those religious and traditional leaders who have articulated positions of plurality. I urge political leaders to maintain a responsible approach and secure an inclusive Liberia that protects its diversity. The process presents an opportunity for the people of Liberia to articulate and take ownership of a shared sense of nationhood, and this should not be wasted.

73. I also call upon the Government of Liberia to take forward a meaningful national reconciliation process in order to satisfy the high demand for political and social conciliation and integration, as well as to appease public perceptions of its inability or unwillingness to provide justice. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission set out a series of critical recommendations whose implementation would help to address impunity and exclusion and address systemic and structural deficits in the State and society that drove conflict. However, the implementation of those recommendations, made public in 2009, remains thwarted by an absence of political will, weak institutional capacity, insufficient resources and a lack of effective coordination.

74. The serious economic downturn Liberia is facing underscores the importance of shifting growth models, from one that is narrowly focused on capital infrastructure investments, concessions and extractive industries to one more diversified, sustainable and focused on local production and employment opportunities. Otherwise, an increasingly constrained fiscal space will limit opportunities for development and service provision and ensure persistent high unemployment, in particular among young people, thereby threatening stability. I therefore welcome the accession of Liberia to the World Trade Organization, which provides an important opportunity for least-developed countries to engage with the global economy within the framework of the rules-based trading system.

75. I commend the continued efforts to strengthen response and preparedness with regard to the Ebola virus disease, as demonstrated by the swift and effective action to contain the most recent outbreak and the declaration, for the fourth time, that Liberia is Ebola-free. It is of paramount importance that this high level of attention on the Ebola virus is sustained, including through early-warning monitoring and surveillance systems at the national and community levels, in order to prevent renewed outbreaks.

76. I note with satisfaction that UNHCR remains on track to reach its target of facilitating the voluntary return of 25,000 Ivorian refugees to their homes in 2015, notwithstanding the serious challenges posted by heavy rains and poor infrastructure. Achieving conditions conducive to sustainable return requires the continued action of the Government of Côte d'Ivoire, and I therefore welcome efforts it has made to listen to, and address, the concerns of refugees about security, land and other issues in areas of return in western Côte d'Ivoire. UNMIL and UNOCI and their respective United Nations country teams will continue to support the Governments of Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia to stabilize their shared border.

77. I congratulate Mrs. Johnson-Sirleaf for once again being in the vanguard — the first woman elected by her peers as Chair of ECOWAS, an organization that played a

critical role in restoring peace to Liberia and that remains the preeminent forum for regional security and economic cooperation. Liberia hereby enjoys an opportunity to develop mechanisms at the national level in areas where ECOWAS provides essential leadership, such as security sector reform and early warning and response. Under Mrs. Johnson-Sirleaf's leadership, ECOWAS will undoubtedly also advance its ongoing efforts to collaboratively mitigate the threat posed by violent extremism in West Africa.

78. As indicated in my previous reports, the conclusion of the security transition should trigger a reimagining of United Nations engagement in Liberia. In accordance with the request made by the Security Council, in its resolution 2239 (2015), I will deploy an assessment mission to Liberia in September to consult with the Government and other stakeholders and transmit my recommendations in a special report on the future of UNMIL and a possible successor United Nations presence, in November. In the meantime, I recommend that the Security Council extend the mandate of UNMIL for a period of three months, until 31 December 2016, with its current mandate and authorized strength.

79. I would like to thank my Special Representative for Liberia, Farid Zarif, as well as all United Nations civilian and uniformed personnel for their continued commitment to peace and stability in Liberia. My appreciation also goes to the troop- and police-contributing countries, donor countries, regional and multilateral organizations, non-governmental organizations, the Peacebuilding Commission and United Nations offices, funds, programmes and specialized agencies, all of which continue to provide invaluable support to Liberia. I wish to recognize in particular the contribution made by the African Union, ECOWAS and the Mano River Union in restoring and sustaining peace in Liberia.

Annex

United Nations Mission in Liberia: military and police strength as at 1 August 2016

Country	Military component				Formed police units	Police officers
	Military observers	Staff officers	Troops	Total		
Argentina	–	–	–	–		–
Bangladesh	4	4	–	8		4
Benin	1	1	–	2		–
Bhutan	–	–	–	–		2
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	1	–	–	1		–
Bosnia and Herzegovina	–	–	–	–		2
Brazil	1	1	–	2		–
Bulgaria	1	–	–	1		–
China	1	3	124	128	140	15
Ecuador	–	–	–	–		–
Egypt	5	1	–	6		1
Ethiopia	3	2	–	5		–
France	–	–	–	–		–
Gambia	3	–	–	3		14
Germany	–	–	–	–		2
Ghana	7	3	55	65		26
India	–	–	–	–	120	4
Indonesia	1	–	–	1		–
Jordan	–	–	–	–		1
Kenya	–	–	–	–		13
Kyrgyzstan	–	–	–	–		2
Malaysia	2	1	–	3		–
Myanmar	2	–	–	2		–
Namibia	1	1	–	2		3
Nepal	2	2	15	19		9
Niger	2	–	–	2		–
Nigeria	9	5	691	705	119	21
Norway	–	–	–	–		6
Pakistan	4	7	88	99		–
Poland	–	–	–	–		3
Republic of Korea	–	–	–	–		6
Republic of Moldova	1	–	–	1		–
Romania	–	–	–	–		1
Russian Federation	1	–	–	1		–
Rwanda	–	–	–	–		–

Country	Military component				Formed police units	Police Officers
	Military observers	Staff officers	Troops	Total		
Serbia	1	–	–	1		–
Sri Lanka	–	–	–	–		3
Sweden	–	–	–	–		9
Switzerland	–	–	–	–		2
Thailand	–	–	–	–		1
Togo	1	1	–	2		–
Turkey	–	–	–	–		2
Uganda	–	–	–	–		5
Ukraine	3	2	160	165		1
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	–	–	–	–		2
United States of America	3	5	–	8		–
Yemen	–	1	–	1		1
Zambia	1	–	–	1		16
Zimbabwe	1	–	–	1		14
Total	**2**	**40**	**160**	**11**	**379**	**191**

Map No. 4211 Rev. 41 UNITED NATIONS
August 2016 (Colour)

Department of Field Support
Cartographic Section

S/2016/706

16-13681

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